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After simulator training, Kimball students take to sky

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Some Kimball students moved from operating a flight simulator in class to getting behind the controls of a small, four-seat plane Monday on Aviation Day for Dale Taylor's technology students.

Kimball Principal Sheri Hardman and juniors Aaron Soulek and Jack Carda disembark a 1976 Cheyenne Warrior four seat plane at Kimball Airport on Monday morning after Carda flew the plane from Mitchell beside flight instructor Scott Gerlach, of Wright Brothers Aviation. (Melanie Brandert/Republic Photo)

Junior student Jack Carda, 17, of Pukwana, was one of two students who flew from Mitchell to Kimball and back with Scott Gerlach, a Wright Brothers Aviation flight instructor in Mitchell.

Carda, who spent several hours on the simulator this school year, chose to fly out on Mitchell's hard-surface runway and land on Kimball's grass one northwest of town. Carda's classmate, Aaron Soulek, flew the Kimball to-Mitchell leg.

Both said they encountered little turbulence on their morning flight to Kimball, which lasted between 30 and 40 minutes in a cloudless sky.

"It was exciting," Carda said of the takeoff. "(The flight) was completely smooth — better than expected. ... It was one of the best days we could have."

Taylor, an industrial technology teacher since 1989, started Aviation Day in 2004 to teach students about one of his passions. He has been a pilot for four years, and Monday was the fourth event.

He began introducing aviation into tech courses 15 years ago, and he expanded the curriculum eight years ago. He acquired a simulator to acquaint students with flying.

"If they have any interest at all, I think that gives them a little spark," Taylor said.

Students spend about eight hours on the simulator in class and come in one night to show Taylor they can take off and land, he said. Some log extra time if they wish.

After Carda, Soulek, Gerlach and Principal Sheri Hardman landed Monday morning at Kimball in a 1976 Cheyenne Warrior, Gerlach told students about the plane and showed the exterior components he checks during a pre-flight plan. The plane travels at about 125 mph, on average.

"For me, it's just a very rewarding experience to see the first time you guys get in the airplane, behind the controls, and to watch you advance through your training," Gerlach said.

After arriving in Kimball, Gerlach, a flight instructor for eight years, credited Carda for performing well behind the controls and practicing on the simulator.

"They get to learn what makes the airplane fly, how to navigate from one airport to the next," he said of students on the simulator. "They've got that working background, so it does make that transition easier."

In the plane, Gerlach said he tells student pilots at which air speed he wants to fly at liftoff and climbing. But the landing is difficult with any student, especially if it's on a grass runway and conditions aren't known, he said.

Though Gerlach took over landing the plane on the Kimball runway, Soulek, 17, said he might have to land on Mitchell's surfaced one — a prospect that scared him a bit.

"When you're coming down, you've got to get slow enough so when you hit (the ground) you don't crash. You've got to make sure you're coming in steady," he said.

Freshman Steve Miedema, 15, was among other students who took a turn behind the "yoke" — the plane's control column — for 20 minutes in the area.

"Everything looks so different while you're up there," he said. "You can feel the wind when it picks up a little bit, and you get a little bit of turbulence. Your heart jumps out of your chest, and then you just feel like you're floating."

Taylor planned other activities for younger students. Seventh-graders through freshmen set off model rockets and later calculated their height.

Freshmen and eighth graders flew radio-controlled airplanes with the assistance of John Donovan, 83, co owner of Donovan's Hobby and Scuba Center in Sioux Falls.

While eighth-grader Colin Geppert, 14, enjoyed flying the radio-controlled planes, he longed to be among the older students who were flying a real airplane.

Next year, he might get his wish.